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## Mobbing in Organizations. Benefits of Identifying the Phenomenon

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### Abstract

Mobbing is a phenomenon that occurs in the organizational context and consists in hostile actions, aggression (verbal, physical, sexual), professional discredit, contempt, isolation etc. All these behaviors are performed by a person/group of persons on a person/group of people, the ultimate goal being, most times, the exclusion of individuals/group of individuals from the organization. Such behaviors are counterproductive and have long-term effects on the physical and mental health of the person assaulted. The paper describes the phenomenon of hostile action types that constitute the phenomenon of "mobbing", its causes and effects; It also emphasizes the benefits of identifying the first signs of the emergence of this phenomenon in time.

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To carry out work in good, synergistic conditions, employees need a positive environment, an atmosphere of collaboration and mutual respect. Most times, collaboration is the key to success of an organization. But not any kind of collaboration, because a poor collaboration can affect and undermine business entity- in these cases, the absence of collaboration is desirable. Through poor collaboration we can understand dysfunctional relationships at work, mobbing, bullying or any form of aggression, a negative working atmosphere, the lack of respect. All this leads to lower productivity of the organization and the emergence of negative attitudes, behaviors and feelings among employees. Most of the organizations are structures that are designed to produce or deliver something of quality.

To do a quality job, employees must:

- use error as a way to improve
- be motivated to make sense of the work that they performed

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- be curious to learn new things, especially from those most competent and analyze new situations that occur
- be competitive and demanding themselves, to evolve (Zlate, 2007).

### 1. Description of Mobbing

Relationships at work can easily degenerate into mobbing, causes are diverse, ranging from poor leadership to employees' individual certain characteristics that may predispose them to become victims. The phenomenon can be translated into counterproductive relationship with repercussions both on the individual and on organization. Leymann (1990), defined mobbing as verbal aggressiveness, harassment, bullying, ignorance - directed behaviors, intentionally and repeatedly towards a coworker. Systematically practiced, mobbing has devastating effects on the person concerned and causes serious disturbances in organizations.

The concept of mobbing was used for the first time in 1990 by Leymann in "Mobbing", which states that it is "a communicative situation that threatens to cause serious individual physical and mental damage. Mobbing is constructed of hostile action, which taken separately, may not seem dangerous, but, constantly repeated, has dangerous effects".

### 2. Specific behaviors of mobbing

In 1990, Leymann, through 300 interviews, found 45 specific behaviors that abusers use against their victims. He classified these behaviors into five categories:

- Actions that can block the expression of victim: he/she cannot express his/hers views in front of his/hers boss, he/she is interrupted when speaking, he/she is not allowed to support his/hers point of view, malicious remarks are made against him/her, he/she is insulted, disparaged, criticized, both professionally and personally, his/hers ideas are considered childish and unfeasible, even if they have the potential to implementation.
- Actions to isolate the victim: offenders never talk to the victim or, if the 'victim' tries to start a conversation, they answer monosyllabically, with hostility, the victim is not allowed to speak to another person, the victim is distributed in a place that isolates him/her from colleagues, the physical presence of the victim is ignored;
- Contempt actions against fellow victim: the victim is spoken against and various rumors about her and her actions are launched, he/she is ridiculed and considered mentally ill, the victim's political or religious beliefs are attacked, there are jokes at the expense of the victim's origin, nationality and privacy, the payment is unfair;
- Professional discredit of the victim: the victim is not assigned tasks or the tasks assigned are above or below his/her level of qualification, some of these being unnecessary or absurd; the tasks assigned are frequently changed and he/she is required to perform humiliating tasks;
- Actions to compromise the health of the victim: tasks that are dangerous and harmful for his/her health, the threat with physical violence, easy physical aggression as a warning, serious physical assault, trouble at work or at home, sexual assault of the victim.

It is estimated that of all specific mobbing behavior, the worst is the aggressive behaviour (physical aggression, sexual assault) (Tomescu, 2010).

Often, however, hostile behavior is not alone, but accompanied by others. The combination of several behaviors can produce effects which are more serious than the appearance of a single behavior. Frequency of mobbing behavior more than once a week, for more than six months is considered the threshold value for diagnosis mobbing.

### 3. Phasis of the mobbing process

Heinz Leymann (1990) identified four stages of the process:

- The first phase is one in which there are some differences of opinion or disputes between employees, most of these being natural for a dynamic and progressive organization. In fact, there are many cases where these are attenuated by themselves. When this does not happen and conflicts persist, the situation may degenerate into mobbing.
- In the second phase, conflicts already begin to affect the victim's psychological balance. The first negative effects from prolonged stress appear: anxiety, insomnia, even panic attacks.
- The third stage is usually the one in which the victim's rights are violated, situation that is tolerated and indirectly decided by the management unit, which leaves the conflict unsolved. Typically, the leadership starts with the preconceived notion of the victim's guilt. Credit is given to the department head or, if applicable, to the majority of employees, never to the person subject to mobbing.
- The fourth phase is the toughest, characterized by stigma, social isolation and even the dismissal of the victim.

Another researcher of the phenomenon of mobbing, Harald Ege, has identified another dimension of the phenomenon: the cultural dimension. According to Ege, Leymann's model is suitable to Swedish reality, or at most it may extend to the Scandinavian scope. Leymann investigated the phenomenon, this not being as true and valid in other countries. Researching the phenomenon in Italy, Ege identified the cultural dimension of the phenomenon and updated the stages of the phenomenon in the context, thus resulting in a 6-phase model. The cultural factor is important, as specified in the organizational theories and intervention procedures. Culture is a crucial factor, as the scientists from Tavistock Institute and American authors that deal with organizational development claim.

#### **4. Phases of the mobbing process – six phases Italian model (Ege, 2000)**

##### *4.1. Zero stage*

Considered a pre-stage, an initial situation identified and validated in Italy and completely unknown in North European culture, state 0 is the psychological conflict. In this pre-stage there is no desire to destroy, but to stand out, to be superior to others.

##### *4.2. First stage: Conflict directed*

At this stage the conflict is directed towards a certain person, a victim is identified.

The conflict, which until then, had a general dimension, is now targeted. The objective of the aggressor is not, this time, to reach the top but to destroy his/her opponent, to remove the individual. At this stage the conflict is not limited to the job, but turned to private matters.

##### *4.3. Second stage :the appearance of mobbing*

The attacks don't cause psychosomatic symptoms or the illness of the victim yet, but create discomfort, anxiety, anger. The relations with colleagues deteriorates and the victim wonders why.

##### *4.4. Third stage: The first psychosomatic symptoms.*

The victim begins to show some health problems and this may extend to longer periods. Common symptoms are: feeling of insecurity, insomnia, problems with digestion.

##### *4.5. Fourth stage: errors and abuses in human resource management*

Mobbing becomes public and is often encouraged by errors of assessment by the department staff. Previous phase leads to victim illness and disease frequencies lead to colleagues' suspiciousness.

#### *4.6. Fifth stage: worsening of the individual psychophysical condition*

At this stage, the victim is in a state of real despair and hopelessness. Mild or severe depression appears, psychotropic treatment consists of psychotherapy, which only really improves since work problems remain and, even more, they get worse.

#### *4.7. Sixth stage: Exclusion from work*

The final result is the exclusion of the mobbing victim from work, either through self-discharge (resignation) or through dismissal or through early retirement or even a traumatic event like suicide, the development of obsessive mania, murder or aggression directed at the aggressor. This phase is the natural consequence of the previous one: depression makes the individual find a way out, either by resignation or by dismissal, a more serious case is that the person is forced to take early retirement. The worst situation is when the mobbing leads to extreme acts.

### **5. The Effects of Mobbing**

Mobbing has devastating effects on the person concerned: its effects on the mental and the psychological reduce work capacity, produce loss of self-confidence. Victims often develop some disorders like: state of depression or anxiety, stress, adjustment disorder. Psychosomatic symptoms are very common in people who are victims of mobbing phenomenon. Some authors (Groeblichhoff, 1996) state that 'Mobbing can cause severe illness, occupational and earning disability, social exclusion, and even suicide'.

As a result of the actions of "mobbing", the victim is led to resign or falls into a lower hierarchical position. Initially, before doing so, the results can be seen in the victims' absenteeism from work or periods of illness (sick leave) frequencies (Vartia, 2001). These results, visible from this moment, are harmful both to the individual (his mental and physical condition) and the organization (the productivity decreases, the tasks previously performed by the victim have to be done by another person and so on).

During mobbing, the victim loses progressively: his/her influence, credibility, respect of others, health, work enthusiasm, confidence, dignity, power to make decisions, friends, family, and even health.

According to Zlate (2007), the effects of mobbing are felt in two main plans:

The organizational plan: professional relationships degradation, damage or degradation of the quality of communication, lack of commitment, absenteeism, staff turnover, frequent sickness leaves, "cracks" in the company's image etc.

The social plan: impaired ability to maintain natural relationships with family, social group or social institutions.

### **6. The Purpose of Mobbing**

It can be varied, but always destructive; it aims to remove a person who is considered somehow "undesirable, uncomfortable" in an organization either by its removal, or by coercing him/her to resign. The phenomenon recently theorized is, however, well known in most organizations. There is almost no person who has not experienced at some point in his professional life, a labor dispute or problems at work. This does not mean, however, that all these people are victims of mobbing phenomenon. From the perspective of mobbing purpose, Harald Ege (2000) - psychologist specialized in mobbing phenomenon – defined mobbing as: action(or series of actions) repeated over a long period of time, made by one or more mobbers to hurt someone (a person who will be called a victim of the phenomenon or a mobbed person) systematically and with a purpose. Therefore, those that mob always have purpose. The goal is, synthetically speaking, professional, psychological and social destruction of the victim.

## 7. Mobbing. The benefits of identifying the phenomenon

Mobbing is not a constructive, normal conflict, a crisis that ends quickly, within a limited time. It is a series of persecutions, attacks and humiliations that occur slowly, subtly and persist for a long time (more than 6 months). The phenomenon is so strong and disabling due to its duration. However, when identified in time, we can intervene and stop the phenomenon, its devastating effects, both at the individual and organizational level. Thus, the effects on the victim's family are stopped. These effects cannot be neglected, the victim suffers and transmits the suffering to the spouse, children, parents; the stress attacks the family which will compensate the victims' frustrations and sorrows only for a period until the family ends its resources, at which point it enters the crisis because the victim becomes a threat to the integrity and health of the family. From this moment on, the family is interested in self-protection and counterattacks the victim. Thus, the victim becomes a double victim, because he/she is deprived of the understanding and help of the family which, unconsciously, protect themselves and no longer support the loved ones.

If the phenomenon is identified in time, the effects of mobbing on the victim, consisting of health problems (somatization and nervous tension, palpitations, tremors, trouble breathing, expression, gastric and digestive problems, insomnia, sleep problems: nightmares, interrupted sleep; intellectual dysfunctions: concentrating and remembering difficulties, dizziness and fainting), financial problems (caused by frequent medical consultations, medication, psychotherapy, job loss and therefore the loss of monthly income), social problems (the social image is devastated, friends and colleagues are lost one by one) can be stopped. Mobbing also has devastating effects on the organization, especially economically: for example an entrepreneur is familiar with the negative effects of this phenomenon will counter it efficiently and rapidly. Identifying mobbing at an early stage should enhance the prevention of mobbing (Niedl, 1996). But if there is no intervention, the efficiency of a person who is mobbed may decrease up to 40%, decreasing the productivity of the organization as well (Ege, 2000). The social consequences are not to be neglected. If the employees are not happy with the atmosphere at work and communicate this to the outside world, the image of the organization suffers and the competing companies can take advantage of this. In this case another entity has to suffer from mobbing: society itself.

In conclusion, stopped at the right time, the phenomenon does not cause the above mentioned devastating effects at an individual, domestic, organizational and social level.

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